A month of faunal investigations and habitat restoration in Chamba.

Spending more than a month in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, located within the western Himalayan region was profoundly eye-opening experience for me. Coming from Karnataka, India with prior experience only in the Western Ghats region, this was my first time venturing into the Himalayan landscape for the purpose of work/research because of which everything felt completely new. The foremost thing that captivated me was its scenic and breathtaking landscape of enormous rocky-mountains with its heavily undulating terrain. As an aspiring wildlife researcher and conservationist, I was excited to document and learn about the region's wildlife while contributing to the Himalayan Restoration Project (HRP) run by Zoo Outreach Organisation.

Primarily, this journey started at the native nursery in Dugli Village, which currently nurtures about 10,000 saplings belonging to 15 species. This nursery along with the forest department has been a pivotal source for the ongoing restoration work here. Throughout the journey, together we planted over 500 saplings at different community people's land who partnered in Zooreach's restoration efforts.

Restoration efforts: sowing seeds in the nursery.

One of the most noticeable faunal taxa here for me was the birds – with more than 30 lifers witnessed and recorded throughout this journey, I was constantly eager to sight and add new birds to my life list which somewhat sprinkled joyfulness to the journey. Furthermore, I assisted Amrin in deploying camera traps near a cave inhabited by a family of 3 Asiatic Black Bears to monitor its cave usage and activity. This yielded exciting results, including several clear images of bears, including cubs, moving in and out of the cave – information that could aid future studies and conservation efforts.

We expanded our faunal studies by setting up local rat traps in two different habitats: our native nursery and nearby natural forest patch. We trapped 22 individuals of small mammals that needs to be identified to its species level. Parallelly, we conducted roadkill surveys on every Monday over a stretch of ~35 km.

Photos: © Amrin Ansari.

During this, we recorded over 30 individuals of roadkills belonging to all the four terrestrial taxa. An absolute surprise was the encounter of a Siberian Weasel. It was a fascinating brief and clear 5-minute sighting, where the first thing that caught my eye was its beautiful rufous coat which made the animal pop out in the midst of lush, grassy and rocky forested background. I could also properly observe its natural instincts, how it moved quickly & quietly without even making a slight sound.

Altogether, this whole Chamba journey incorporated with these rookie research activities, deepened my understanding to Himalayan diversity. More importantly, not only just revealed and offered what all this area & landscape harbours but also enlightened me and laid the groundwork for deeper scientific work in future, by not only expanding my knowledge but also sparked numerous new ideas and a strong motivation to continue by being a part of the HRP in this remarkable region, which has lit this blazing number of ideas.

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Himalayan skyline view from Chamba.

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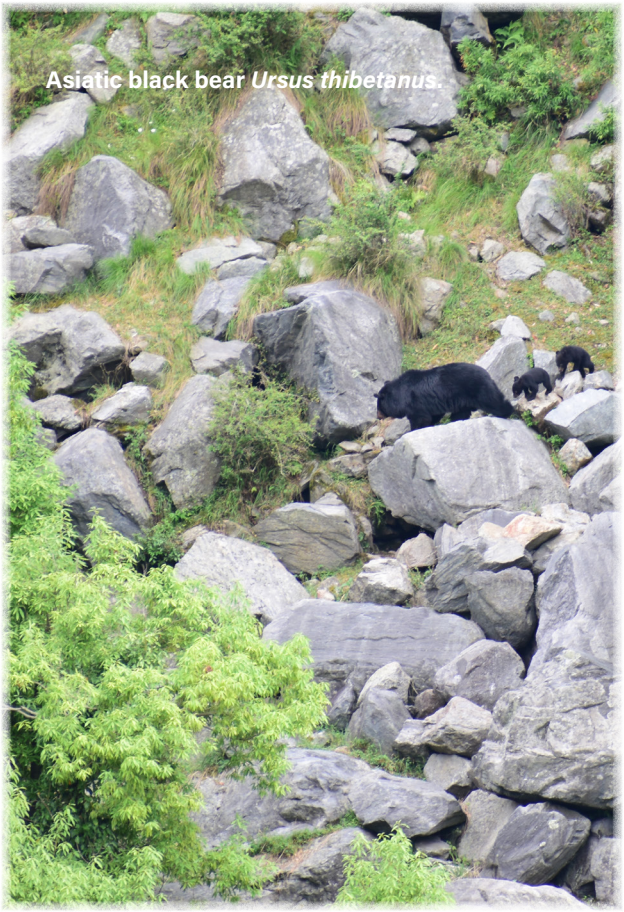
Zooreach Activity Update

Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeon *Treron sphenurus.*

Red-billed Blue-Magpie *Urocissa erythrorycha.*

Siberian Weasel *Mustela sibirica.*


Asiatic black bear *Ursus thibetanus.*